WHIRRAKEE

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
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Website: www.bendigofieldnaturalists.asn.au

E-mail address: info@bendigofieldnaturalists.asn.au

Office Bearers for 2014 - 2015

President	*vacant*		
Vice President	Jenny Shield	e-mail: jennyshield66@gmail.com	5441 4029
Secretary/Public Officer	Matt Comer		0409 162 627
Treasurer	Ben Goonan		

Positions delegated by the Committee

Minute Secretary	*vacant*	
Excursion organiser	John Lindner	5448 3406
Syllabus organiser	Ben Goonan	
Librarian	Diana Collier & Maryann Hill	5443 0137
Garden Convenor/Secretary	Jan Orr	
Hall Management	Maurie Lewis (assisted by Rob Moors)	0407 427179
Whirrakee contact/editor	Sabine Wilkens e-mail: s.wilkens@latrobe.edu.au	5443 2797
Whirrakee mailing coordinator	*vacant*	
Website coordinator/Webmaster	Ben Goonan	

Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $40; Family $50; Concession: Single $35; Family $40. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $40.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The meeting starts with members sharing their recent natural history observations. The invited speaker starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper. The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 5:30pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Alistair White, Kerrie Norris, Diana Collier, Devi Shanty, Simon Hay, John McCallum

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. Several interclub field naturalist campouts are held every year.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is actively involved in local conservation issues. An **indigenous garden** has been established around the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building. Working bees are advertised on the *Whirrakee* diary page.

Bird Observing: Club members conduct regular bird surveys. Please contact Anne Bridley 5442 6188 or Glenise Moors 5439 6254 for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5442 6188. To propose bird observing excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club

Vol. 36, No. 7, August 2015

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*), which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

CONTENT

Item	Contributor	Page
Short notices		3
Colour photos	various contributors	4-7
Sensing nature: on becoming a naturalist	Ben Goonan	8
Bird watching at the water treatment works	John Lindner	9
Frog Pond Project: Report and planting day	Kerrie Norris	10
Book recommendation: Where Song Began	John Lindner	10

Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions should be posted or e-mailed to the editor at least two days prior to the last Wednesday of the month. They will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although space restrictions occasionally require shortening of articles or holding them over till the following edition of *Whirrakee*.

Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's Note

There is a lot happening in the club over the next two months (John Lindner put this down to the infectious 70th Anniversary fever): We have two excursions this month, as well as the frog pond planting day at Kangaroo Flat Botanic Gardens and an important planning meeting facilitated by Vanessa Richardson. Please consider coming along to this meeting and contribute to the club's success in one way or another. Who says nothing happens in winter? Then, next month we have the Annual General Meeting. A nomination slip is included in this edition and you are encouraged to nominate for a position and take an active role. In September there is also the SEANA campout, see details on the back cover. The Golden Wattle has started flowering, so the bush is beginning to look colourful again, a sight that always gladdens the heart.

Front page photograph: John Lindner

A rare sight…view of Mount Franklin with snow from the Guildford Plateau. This was taken at one of the 12 stops during the July geology excursion. Hopefully the report and more photos will fit into the next *Whirrakee*

Short Notices

NOTICE FOR ALL BFNC MEMBERS

All members are invited and encouraged to participate in the Planning Meeting
Saturday 15 August 2015
9.15am for 9.30 start
1pm finish
Venue is BFNC Rooms, Old High Street, Golden Square
Wheelchair access is available

This will be an informal get together to enable club members to reflect and discuss creatively this club's future plans. It will be facilitated by Vanessa Richardson who has worked professionally helping large groups for more than 20 years. Vanessa is donating her time for this special event.
The club will provide a catered 'brunch' for participating members. RSVP for catering (and special diet needs) to Jenny Shield ph 0455138444 or email jennyshield66@gmail.com and all other enquiries to Vanessa Richardson ph 0427000428 or email vanessarichardson@activ8.net.au

Missing out on being published this month is Anne Bridley's plant and bird list for the May Bung Bong Excursion. Please contact Anne (or the editor) if interested in what was seen. Also, except for the front page photo, we did not have space for the illustrated July geology excursion report from John Lindner; this will hopefully fit in next month.

An answer to Karen Thomas' question in the July *Whirrakee* by Peter Muller

I was reading your July *Whirrakee* and I noticed a photo and a question about a Turret/ tube on page 5 (below left). I think this structure is made by a *Camponotus* ant, probably *Camponotus innexus,* but hard to say exactly without seeing the ant. I have seen similar structures at several places, including Inverleigh and Anglesea. I don't know for certain but, perhaps it is a response to protect from sheet water resulting from heavy rain. Other species of *Camponotus* build a raised structure at the nest hole to assist the nuptial flight of new queens and thus aid in dispersal, so that may be also a possibility. There are always more questions than answers!
Further useful information: An 1999 article from the Geelong field Nats "An Ant of the Inverleigh Common ". You should be able to search for it on the net. I am with the Ballarat Field Nats and have an interest in ants.
Hope this Helps…."Ants Are Everywhere"
Peter Muller, Enfield Victoria.

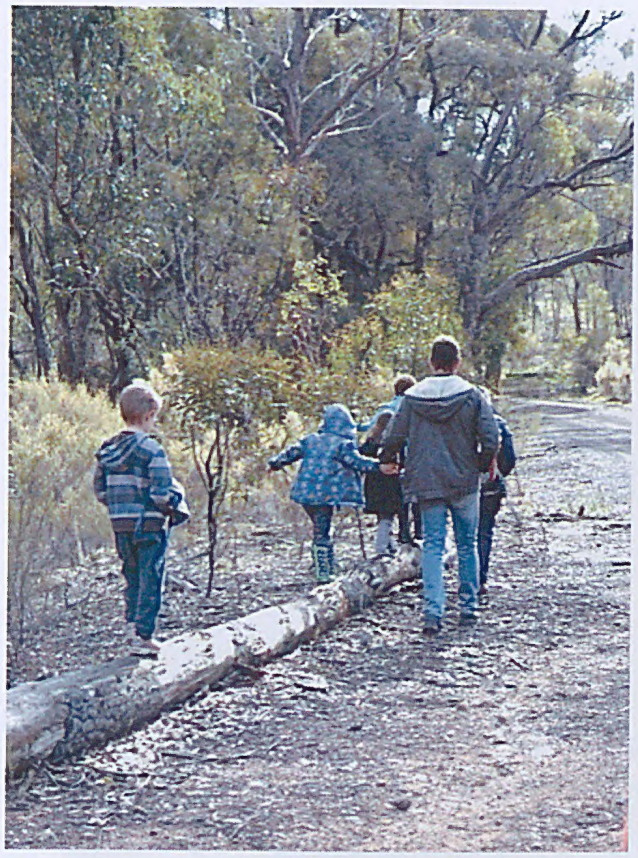
Ed's note: Peter has kindly provided some photos of similar structures, see page 7.

Cartography Community Mapping, July update by Mal Haysom

Cartography Community Mapping, CCM, has released its final map in the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park series. The Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park, CDNHP, stretches some 25 kilometres north to south. CCM provides six topographical maps that cover the bulk of the CDNHP. These topographical maps show access roads, walking tracks and other features. The basic file format for these maps is PDF intended for printing at A3 (with one exception intended for printing at A4). (The Goldfields Library, Kangaroo Flat and Castlemaine branches can provide A3 colour prints at competitive prices, the Bendigo branch can provide A4 colour prints). In addition there are digital versions of each map available for map capable GPS units or for application with Google Earth (see page 7 for an example).

Notice of Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting will be held on Wednesday, 9 September 2015 at 7.30pm. It will be followed by the speaker, Mr. Steve Meacher (with Mr. Eric Wilkinson), 'Leadbeater's Possum: Flagship for the Forests'



July Family Nature Club excursion –
Left: A lovely ramble on Cherry Tree Lane, at No 7, Crusoe Reservoir

Below: Miles Geldart with some honeycomb one of the children found. (Photos by Joy Clusker)

Left: This nestbox in Kangaroo Gully has often had Brush-tailed Phascogale (Tuan) occupying it, since it was erected in 1999. It is assumed a female Tuan is preparing her nest in this box (photo taken 15.7.2015 by Kerrie Norris). Besides a small piece of shredded bark and a small hank of sheep's wool hanging out of the opening, a piece of daggy wool was caught on the trunk of the Ironbark. A small feather is embedded in the wool.

Book recommendation…..continued from pg 10: "Where Song Began" is a book we as field naturalists can easily relate to: there are many instances of in-the-field bird-watching; there are plenty of references to birds that we all know (eg. White-winged Choughs, Magpies, Currawongs); the central section of colour plates include some great bird shots with comprehensive captions.

One of our long ago club members in the 1980s was Don Franklin. He was the principal author of "The eucalypts of the Bendigo district". After moving to the Northern Territory, Don established himself as an ecologist, and now has numerous publications to his name. A major research project on which Don first worked was investigating the status of the Gouldian Finch. With regard to the decline of granivorous species, one of the conclusions of his many years' investigation is that the combined effects of cattle-grazing and annual firing are reducing seed supplies and cover, and hence threatening many bird species (p. 216). Don is also listed prominently in the bibliography.

This picturesque scene was captured on 19.7.15 by Kerrie Norris and shows a White-faced heron stalking prey/feeding at Kangaroo Flat Botanical Garden (can you spot it?). See page 10 for activities in this part of Bendigo and an invitation to improve it further..

A Rowville wattlebird
by Tom Burton

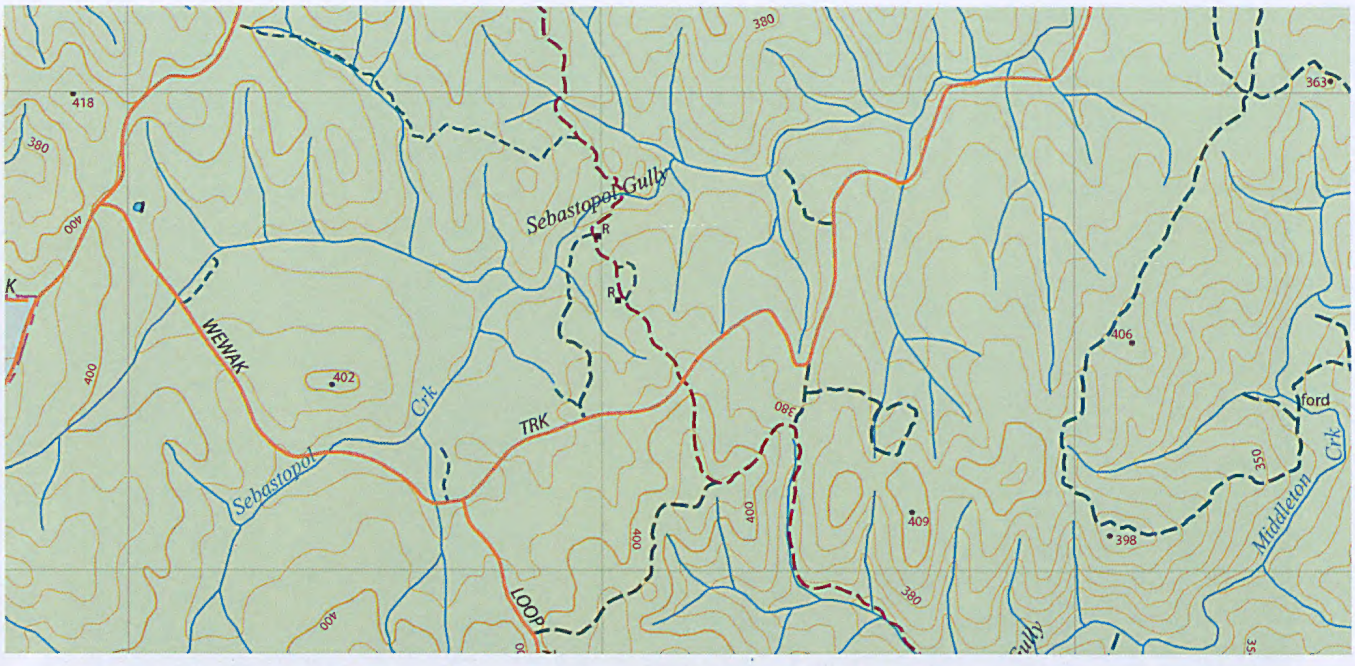
This Red Wattlebird is white-ish. It seems to have been fledged in March, when it first appeared looking more like a blackbird, its tail not having reached full length. It "owned" the two grevilleas near our letter-box for a while, but these days it disappears for a few days at a time, but so far it has always come back. It is not quite white. It has the typical RWBird yellow belly, and there is a bit of colour on the head and tail. The legs and beak are pinkish, but the eyes are brown, and you can see a tiny red wattle on the cheek, so it is not strictly an albino. The wattle lengthens with age. The pic is blown up a long way- I took it with my phone from 15m away.

One cold morning....
(from Karen Thomas)
... disturbed in my firewood pile ...nice fat tail.... crawled up my arm and under top of jumper at back of neck... remained in there nice and warm until I found a spot for it

Peter Johnson (Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning) identified it as a Wood Gecko (*Diplodactylus vittatus*) and added: 'It's nocturnal and terrestrial, and like its name suggests it shelters under crevices in wood or under bark or rocks and in burrows during the day. It has immovable eye lids and uses its tongue to clean the surface of its eyes. Sometimes it barks or squeaks if threatened or disturbed.

Left and left below: Two photos taken in coastal woodland by Peter Muller from Enfield. Peter send these as further examples of ant structures (see page3), built perhaps to ward off flowing water or aid in queens' nuptial flights or...?

Below: This one is from the Otways, taken in June this year (photo by S.Wilkens) (a scale would have been useful...)



Cartography Community mapping - Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park series by Mal Haysom (see page 3).

The attached file is an extract from one of the maps. If it prints with the grid at about 60 x 60 mm (ie the full image would amount to some 180 mm width) then it will be about the same scale as the actual map.

Below, images from the Otways (taken in June by S. Wilkens…help is needed to identify the fungi). Could the big white fungus be myrtle wilt?

The pink heath (right) was well ahead of that in our own region. Below: a branchlet of southern beech…no photo (of mine anyway) can capture the awe-inspiring feeling of sharing the ground with these ancient trees.

Sensing nature: on becoming a naturalist

by Ben Goonan

What does it mean to say, "I am a naturalist"? For me it means that before almost anything else in my life, I see myself and identify as a naturalist. This way of knowing myself both springs from, and contributes to, a way of being that is inextricably interwoven with experiencing the natural world around me. That is, I perceive, listen to, feel, and move in the world with a keenly refined sense for the detail and patterns of nature. I observe, reflect, understand, imagine and create my world as if nature matters. As a result I live close to nature, with nature, and act for nature. Intrinsically and instinctually I'm a naturalist.

Being this way has been part of my life since my earliest memories. For example, I vividly recall visiting an area of bush out at Mandurang, with family, to find some special orchids and while we were there learning the Latin names of various plants including *Daviesia ulicifolia*. I have never forgotten these plants or that experience and I return to this place on occasion to reacquaint myself with these species. Over the years, at various times, with family, friends and/or mentors, I have found many other, now cherished, places where formative experiences and fond memories are held.

Throughout my childhood I remember travelling to many distant places, often in search of particular species that were rare, threatened, interesting and/or new. I also remember travelling to places that were notable or distinct landscapes like the Alps in summer or the coast. An important activity on these journeys and was making lists as we went of everything we observed. I was recording an ever growing array of encounters and adding to my mental catalogue of natural wonders. Travelling, searching, finding and recording. Listing, identifying and memorising. Season in and season out, new places and old places, these repeated experiences became part of my being. This way of learning wasn't restricted to travelling. For years, my brother and I kept monthly bird lists of the species we observed in the yard at home. We grew to expect to see certain species every month (week or day even), and anticipated with a certain enthusiasm, the new species we hadn't yet recorded. For a small urban block we amassed quite a list.

Sharing these experiences with others, mostly family and/or much older naturalists, provided a sense of connectivity to a greater story of nature that began before me. Through my dear uncle and aunt, Patrick and Mary Ward, who are undoubtedly my greatest source of inspiration and knowledge, and to whom I will be forever grateful, I met many well respected naturalists. In sharing experiences with these people, going to places (sometimes special places), receiving knowledge, understanding and connections I breathe life into, and carry on, their stories. I also remember with great fondness, the Junior Field Naturalists, which was a rare chance to do all these things with other kids.

Since these foundational experiences, growing up and joining the Field Naturalists Club, and going onto University, I have applied my naturalist ways to making a living. As a professional I have recorded thousands of new populations of threatened flora and fauna species, including many first records for some region or place, and the first record of a species not seen for over 100 years. I have contributed in various ways to the broad scale conservation, management and restoration of significant natural heritage. I have also tried to impart my knowledge, sense of wonder and enthusiasm for the natural word onto hundreds of students, Landcare group members, people I know and those who I do not. These things are important to me. For me, I have always identified as a naturalist, even when I was young. It is however, only now when I look back that I realise this was all part of long journey to becoming a naturalist (and I have a long way to go yet).

City of Greater Bendigo – Environment Strategy Forum (2): August 5, 6-8pm
'Growth, Development and Biodiversity'
(see June *Whirrakee* for details)

Bird watching at the water treatment works by John Lindner

Our club has been conducting biannual water bird surveys (species lists and actual counts of numbers) for many years. The surveys are usually in Autumn and Spring. The results are reported to Coliban Water. I've always wondered what they actually do with this kind of information, but I suppose it's stored away in a computer somewhere.

Now I must confess that I find counting birds on the water or on the wing incredibly tedious, and I usually try to leave it to somebody else. So far, I seem to have escaped censure for this quite spineless strategy. The secret? Just keep quiet, lay low and leave it to others.

To me, lists of species and numbers are of limited interest. The really wonderful thing about these regular forays is that on every occasion we have observed some unique behavior by one or more waterbird species. This has usually only been possible because we have a number of spotting telescopes on tripods, which make close-up viewing of birds over a long distance a real pleasure. These have belonged to Glenise Moors and Jan Orr, but now John McCallum has one too. Not only can you see the textures of feathers, the colours of legs and the shapes of bills, but you can observe behaviour in great detail. It helps that waterbirds are reasonably static subjects, much larger and easier to observe than bushbirds. My intention here is to encourage you to come next time, and give it a go yourself. But please don't copy my bad example by being a reluctant counter.

Here are some examples of the species and fascinating behaviors we have observed.

30 March 2012 (see report in *Whirrakee*, May 2012)

- Banded Landrails, dashing back and forth across the road, and briefly skirmishing.
- Musk Duck, male, displaying on open water, body contortions, tail-flicking, splashing water with its feet, loud whistling, "steaming" up and down (an old name is Steamer).
- Blue-billed Ducks, group of males in their brightest plumage, repeatedly swimming out from the island, skirmishing and returning to the point.

23 August 2013

- Spotted Crakes foraging in a quiet little corner on May Swamp.
- Black-tailed Native Hen, small group, running madly but cohesively about under the trees near the corner swamp in Wallenjoe Road.

28 February 2014

- Chestnut Teal, male and female.
- Southern Shoveller, male and female.
- Blue-billed Duck, male and female.
- Musk Duck, male and female. The colourful males of the first three species were of particular interest. We could also observe the different foraging behaviours.

15 August 2014

- Blue-billed Duck group, hunkered down and sleeping, bills tucked into plumage.
- Whistling Kite X 3. One was harassing a Grey Teal female with one duckling, both of which made strenuous efforts to avoid the predator.
- Black Swan, many pairs with large, fluffy, grey cygnets.

6 March 2015

- Musk Duck female with 2 young, being harried by a Whistling Kite.

Other species that have been of interest are:

- Freckled Duck. Occasional sighting, valuable to examine the distinctive head profile.
- Australasian Coot. Can be extremely numerous, and usually pretty active foragers.
- White-backed Swallow. Occasional sighting.
- Red-kneed Dotterel. Occasional sighting.
- Eastern Swamphen. Can be quite numerous at May Swamp.
- Various birds of prey are often seen – Wedge-tailed Eagle, Fork-tailed Kite, Swamp Harrier, Brown Falcon, Little Eagle, Whistling Eagle.

Ed: please see back page for the details of the next excursion to this interesting site.

Report: Frog Pond Project Revisited

In 2003 (the early stages of the 13 year drought), the BFNC Fauna Group acquired a grant to improve the frog habitat of an ornamenttal pond in City of Greater Greater Bendigo's (CoGB) Kangaroo Flat Botanical Garden along Tipperary Creek.
In collaboration with CoGB staff and several other individuals and community groups, logs and piles of rocks were added to the pond along with the planting of protective shrubs, native grasses, sedges and water plants. However, further development was put on hold until, "...the drought breaks". Of course, the water plants did not survive the pressure of the hungry water birds nor the shrubs the extended dry period. But the pond continues to provide reasonable frog habitat with a variety of grasses and sedges and some shrubs at the edge of the high water mark and in the creek tributary. At least two species of frogs were audible on 19th July 2015 at midday during cool but sunny weather.
With some grant money still to be spent, the CoGB Natural Reserves staff are working with the Club to complete the project and further enhance the vegetation corridor and provide habitat for frogs and native fauna. Preparations have begun for the planting of a native grass lawn on the northern border of the pond.
Members and friends are invited to participate in the major lawn **planting morning on Sunday 16th August from 10 am till noon**. The Family Nature Club will also be participating in the planting and other frog friendly activities in the vicinity. (See planting details on back page). Please contact Kerrie 0488 297 532 if you require further details or would like to assist with the Family Nature Club programme.

Book Recommendation by John Lindner
Where Song Began, Tim Low
Penguin/Viking 2014
Bendigo Library call number 598 LOW

I have not titled this article "book review", since that implies that I have the knowledge to critically evaluate the propositions put forward. That not being the case, it is more like a recommendation for you to get hold of this intriguing book. I am somewhat of a devotee of "big theme" books which look at a vast field of information and ideas, and attempt to define the main threads and draw conclusions, often new ones. There is plenty of scope for the creative imagination to meld with scientific data and field observation. This book fulfills that requirement admirably, and it's a damn good read into the bargain.

The main purpose is to review and represent the evidence that Australia served as a major centre of evolution of bird species, at the time when it was part of the great southern landmass Gondwana. For some considerable time, bird evolution was considered to have had its most important centre in the northern hemisphere landmass Pangaea.
But Low also examines some intriguing aspects of Australia's bird life: the level of aggression within and between species, especially honeyeaters; pollination and seed-transportation through birds, such as honeyeaters, parrots, pigeons and cassowaries; the background and critical effects of low soil fertility and fire.

I suppose I have an instinctive respect for a book whose gestation has taken 20 years. Low certainly presents some convincing arguments. I'm sure not all of his conclusions would be accepted by some scientists in the field. Oh well, let the academics argue the minutiae – general readers like myself don't care. Certainly, Low's facility with written English is very beguiling and he is not afraid to make leaps to link phenomena together. As befits a book with such a wide scope, the references and bibliography are vast.

I have previously read two others of Tim Low's books "Bush tucker – Australia's wild food harvest" (1989) and "Feral Future" (1999), on the increasing domination of our natural areas by introduced species. This was also a most interesting book, a bit depressing probably – I'll need to reread that one.

...continued on page 7

Diary

All Club meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High St Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

Wednesday August 12 7.30pm
Our speaker for this month is Mr. Gerry Gill will talk about 'An evaluation of Aboriginal landscape management practices viewed from the Anthropocene'

Club Excursions in August

1. Waterbird survey and count

Date Friday August 14 (half-day)
Leader Anne Bridley
Location Coliban Water sewerage treatment works, Epsom
Details Meet 9.00 am in Wallenjoe Road at the bend where the entrance gate to the big pond is located. This is 1.5 km down Wallenjoe from Howard Street, Epsom. It is the first prominent bend to the left, with the gate on your right.
Activity 3.5 km walk, observing and counting waterbirds. This is a circuit at a slow pace of the main pond and the lower swamp, returning by the road.
What to bring Warm clothes, beanie, boots, raincoat, morning tea, binoculars, spotting scope if you have one
Cancellation We would only cancel this activity if there was steady pouring rain. If there are only intermittent showers, we will most likely still proceed.

2. Wattle Excursion Sunday 23 August
(note change of date from 30 August)
On a reconnaissance trip to the Whipstick, it was decided that it would be best to bring the date forward to give the best chance of seeing Whirrakee Wattle in full flowering display.
Meeting 8.30 at the clubrooms, Old High Street, Golden Square
Leader John Lindner and others
Program Morning: Salomon Gully Flora Reserve, Quarry Hill: short walk with 5 acacias, other good wildflowers and a look at what has happened since the fuel reduction burn. Afternoon: Southern Whipstick, north of Huntly: 33 km circuit from Huntly township to visit 4 acacias, including Whirrakee Wattle, Bent-leaf Wattle and Ploughshare Wattle (Black Rock)
Please bring Morning and afternoon tea, lunch, chair to sit on, walking boots, raincoat, warm clothes, camera, notebook

3. Frog pond Lawn Planting Day
When: Sunday 16th August, 10 am till noon
Where: Kangaroo Flat Botanical Garden (western side of railway line between Camp and Railway Streets). Meet at BBQ picnic shelter at end of Camp St Kangaroo Flat
Bring Appropriate protective clothing for weather, sturdy shoes and gloves, drinking water or thermos and snack for morning tea.
Equipment - for planting will be provided by CoGB Natural Reserves staff
Optional – bring a picnic or BBQ lunch, binoculars and stay on to enjoy and maybe explore further along Tipperary Creek before it reaches Bendigo Creek at Rotary Park
Contact Kerrie Norris 0488 297 532

Proposed Spring Campout (Change Of Date)

Location Mount Samaria State Park
Dates Weekend 17 - 18 October
Change of date The original date proposed was mid-September, but I have been advised that this is likely to be too wet and cold.
Full details These will be available in the September *Whirrakee*

South-East Australian Naturalists Network (SEANA) 25th – 27th September

The spring camp will be hosted by the Donald FNC, check the May *Whirrakee* for details.
N.B. re: Accommodation
Please be advised that if you are still wishing to book accommodation in Donald for the SEANA Spring Camp the contact details to book a site at the Donald Racecourse have changed. Please now contact Jack 0429 771 655 or Dianne 0409 704 951. There are plenty of non-powered sites available.